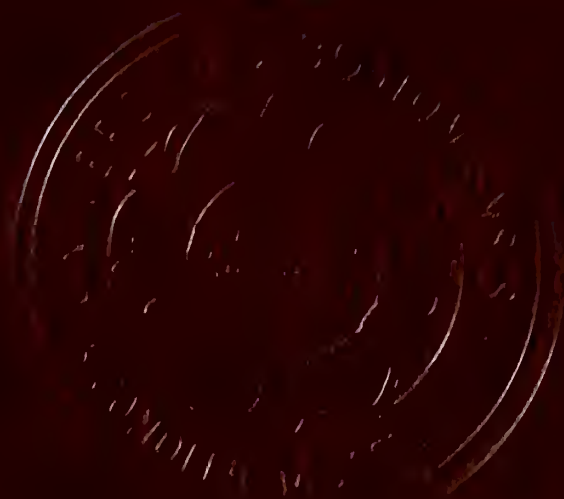


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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

AMUSEMENTS, GAMES, AND SPORTS MENTIONED
IN SIX NOVELS OF JANE AUSTEN

by

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(A.B., College of the Holy Cross, 1926)

submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

1945

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CHAPTER I

THE STUDY AND EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED

No thorough study of the novels of Jane Austen could be complete until the student had placed beneath a literary microscope "the little bit (two inches wide) of ivory on which I work with so fine a brush as produces little effect, after much labor."¹ Under such searching enlargement, a beautiful grain of characterization can be discerned running clearly and steadily through six novels. This delicate delineation of character was presented by Miss Austen while her fictitious personages were at play, not when they were at work.

A scientific examiner would also discover additional lacquer adorning that bit of ivory in the artistic presentation of the recreational life enjoyed by a few persons of the rural gentry of England at the turn of the nineteenth century. Excellent contributions to the novel of manners, Jane Austen's vivid and truthful pictures of the manners of that country society have an historical as well as a literary value.

¹ Sense and Sensibility, introduction, Jane Austen, p. XXIX.

Statement of the Study. It was the purpose of this study (1) to record the several kinds of amusements, entertainments, games, recreations, and sports mentioned in six novels of Jane Austen; (2) to show specific examples of the author's development of diversional situations; and (3) to present conclusions as to Miss Austen's art and also her reflection of the life of her day.

Significance of the Study. Although setting, plot, and character are the ordinary substance of any novel, no one has yet attempted to judge Jane Austen's technique merely by what she writes of relaxation or sport. Yet her characters reveal themselves chiefly at social gatherings; her settings are authentic pictures of the manor-houses, watering-places, parks, and towns of the day; and her desultory plots are often advanced by the use of recreation or enjoyment. Dull as this study may be to the reader, it can not help shedding considerable light upon the indubitable skill of characterization, the certain realism of setting, and the unquestionable ingenuity of plot employed by Miss Austen.

The student did not make a list of all the recreational activities indulged in by characters in the novels but attempted to criticize the uses of some activities as evidence of the technique of Miss Austen and her observations of country life in England at that time.

II. EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED

Amusements, games, and sports. These self-explanatory terms would normally include nearly all of the human pleasures. In this investigation, however, dining, drinking, talking, teasing, and visiting were not considered typical enough to merit a report. Driving in a carriage, riding horseback, and walking were examined only when done for enjoyment or exercise. Household pets were not checked, but hunting dogs and riding horses were noted. A very few items of simple childish activity, such as cutting up paper, rolling downhill, petting a dormouse, flying a kite, and having a doll were all likewise omitted in this examination.

Smoking was not sought; oddly enough, there was no mention of it. A glass of wine now and then for some tired woman constituted most of the drinking, except for an occasional reference to some man's fondness for wine.

Six novels. In order to preserve equality and accuracy in the findings, only the six well-known novels were used, those by which she herself chose to be judged. Since only fiction material would represent Jane Austen's worth as a novelist of diversions, all her published letters were read but were omitted from the scoring. Similarly, Lady Susan and The Watsons were not examined. Jane Austen did not offer Lady Susan for publication; The Watsons she did not finish.

Thus there remained Pride and Prejudice, Sense and Sensibility, Northanger Abbey, Mansfield Park, Emma, and Persuasion. Jane Austen would have been extremely well pleased with the Winchester edition used in this research. The type is large and heavy; the prefaces are informative; the colored illustrations by C. E. and H. M. Brock are beautiful; the tribute by the late William Lyon Phelps is heart-warming.

CHAPTER II

JANE AUSTEN

Realism. Jane Austen wrote of persons, places, and societies she knew well. She wrote chiefly of the rural gentry, whether they were at their own country park or visiting London or Bath. Even in this narrow circle she further restricted her characters. Many of her gentlemen followed or had followed the sea, simply because Miss Austen's brothers had done so and she had listened often to their tales. There were several clergymen encountered in her novels; her own father had been one. Although it did not appear that any of her fictitious personages were meant to signify real people, yet it seemed that she portrayed types she knew. So true to her own powers of observations had she been that there was not found any instance of a private conversation between two men, probably because as a woman she could not have known what two men alone might say to each other!

A novelist so faithful to real life would certainly reflect with clearness the social pastimes of persons she lived among. She did not, however, depict labor or work at all. Furniture was little described, dishes or menus rarely mentioned. The limited diversions of rural ladies and gentlemen thus came in for a greater share of treatment.

Miss Austen lived most of her life at Steventon, a tiny

village of Hampshire, situated seven miles from Basingstoke among the chalk hills of North Hants. She visited friends and relatives at Godmersham in Kent; she spent holidays at Lyme Regis, Teignmouth, Sidmouth, and other seaside places of England. Occasionally she went to London. Southampton was her home for two years, Chawton for eight.

All of these personal experiences in genteel country society were reflected in the Austen novels.

Attitude toward pastime. An examination of Miss Austen's novels showed her attitude toward diversion to be one of sympathetic indulgence. She seemed to expect her characters to enjoy themselves as much as their personality and situation allowed.

Indeed, William Lyon Phelps wrote concerning her:

Jane Austen has been regarded by many as a prim, prudish old maid, and yet the stricter women of our more liberal times would look upon her as a daughter of Belial, for she loved to drink wine, she loved to dance, and she delighted in the theatre.¹

Reared in a home where cards and dancing were enjoyed often during the week, Jane Austen saw to it that her fictitious sisters attended balls frequently. Because she and her sister walked so much themselves, she got mixed groups out into the air at every turn. It is common knowledge among au-

¹ Sense and Sensibility, Vol. I, introduction, Jane Austen, p. XV.

thorities on Jane Austen that as a child she had a piano and that she played that instrument later for country dances at Chawton. At Lyme and Bath, according to many of her letters, she enjoyed dancing, both as a young girl and as a mature woman. She sang, drew well, did various types of needlework, and liked such games as cup and ball, and spillikins. At the parsonage she enjoyed her father's reading aloud; she helped there in home-made theatrical productions in the barn.

Most of these personal enjoyments found their way into the Austen novels, but they were not forced in; they belonged there because they were a part of a perfect picture of country gentry at that time.

Isolating these recreations and studying them separately made the scenes, persons, and events seem strange, like the previews of coming attractions at the local theatre; yet that was the only method possible in a study such as this. Of hundreds of references worthy of selection, those only have been used which contributed to variety as well as to interest.

Use of diversion. Strictly the realist, Jane Austen refrained from picturing men at work probably because she knew little about business. Her fictitious men, accordingly, were retired naval men, clergymen, sailors home on leave, or gentlemen whose incomes were assured. Her only references to hunting, fishing, shooting, and riding were used as bits of con-

versation or as glimpses of men just returned from those sports or about to indulge in them.

Because the ladies of 1800 or so could not have become actresses, secretaries, or nurses without losing their social standing, and because the ladies of country society rarely had to bother with household tasks themselves, our author likewise abstained from the mention of women at work.

Thus there remained but one serious occupation of young ladies and gentlemen for Jane Austen to use in her novels. It was their pursuit of each other! The gentlemen had ample leisure (even after having chased the hare and deer all day) for an entire evening's courting of the ladies, with its ultimate objective the gaining of a wife. The ladies, if they did not wish to become governesses, had nothing so important in life as the job of acquiring a husband, always easier to attract at a dance, an assembly, or a ball.

For these reasons, then, Miss Austen chose to depict a train of amusements and entertainments. But were these diversions really a part of the tranquillity of a country village in England almost one hundred and fifty years ago? They were more than that; they were actually a great part of Miss Austen's family life.

CHAPTER III

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

This novel, Jane Austen's masterpiece, was probably begun in October, 1796, and finished in August, 1797. Like her other novels, it dealt with the love affairs of young women in the upper middle class of English society in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

Philip Darcy was pride; Elizabeth Bennet was prejudice; the plot was the struggle of their individual personalities, ending happily in love and marriage. The scene was laid at the village of Longbourn, a mile from the market-town of Meryton in Hertfordshire.

In this story the author presented her greatest creation, Elizabeth Bennet. Miss Bennet was an important figure in most of the uses of relaxation, displaying her unusual character especially at dances.

As a matter of record, the plot proper started with the ball at Meryton, where Elizabeth overheard Darcy speak of her disparagingly and decline to be introduced to her because though she was "tolerable" she was "not handsome enough" to tempt him.¹ Only twenty-two pages later, this time at Lucas

¹ Pride and Prejudice, Vol. I, Chap. III, p. 16.

Lodge, Elizabeth evened the score by refusing to accept Mr. Darcy's offer to dance.²

Thus the budding novelist used two of the finest balls of the season, not only to propel the plot but also to offset the puppy pride of discourteous Darcy by the resolute self-respect of Elizabeth Bennet. And at assemblies, at cards, or at the pianoforte the lovely character of Elizabeth further unfolded itself like the satin petals of the fragrant damask rose whose color bloomed in her cheeks.

The mention of cards reminds one that the writer who liked to pay cards so much herself farsightedly aided her rather common plot by using a game of lottery to foreshadow the scandalous elopement of the vulgar Lydia Bennet with dashing George Wickham. This instance, which follows here, also showed Lydia as the giddiest girl in the Austen novels.

Mr. Wickham did not play at whist, and with ready delight was he received at the other table between Elizabeth and Lydia. At first there seemed danger of Lydia's engrossing him entirely, for she was a most determined talker; but being likewise extremely fond of lottery tickets, she soon grew too much interested in the game, too eager in making bets and exclaiming after prizes to have attention for anybody in particular.³

Then a few pages later:

Lydia talked incessantly of lottery tickets, of the fish she had lost and the fish she had won; and Mr Collins in describing the civility of Mr and Mrs Philips, protesting

² Pride and Prejudice, Vol. I, Chap. VI, p. 38.

³ Ibid., Chap. XVI, pp. 117-118.

that he did not in the least regard his losses [five shillings] at whist, enumerating all the dishes at supper, and repeatedly fearing that he crowded his cousins, had more to say than he could well manage before the carriage stopped at Longbourn House.⁴

One of the oddest bits of play in the entire group of Austen novels was the fun enjoyed by Lydia Bennet and some of her soldier acquaintances of the militia regiment quartered at Meryton. A Militiaman, Chamberlayne, dressed as a woman and fooled by the impersonation various other soldiers who happened into the home of Colonel and Mrs. Forster.

This item, repeated to Elizabeth by Lydia, was not considered important even by the author. A reflective reader, though, could well have pondered on the freedom and laxity of the Forster home, where much could happen to a silly, impressionable girl.⁵

Only one more example is necessary. The occasion was that on which Elizabeth Bennet, on a Derbyshire tour with her uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, was in their company strolling about the beautiful Pemberley estate of Mr. Darcy, not dreaming that the gentleman was within miles of his vast country seat. Darcy, brought home by business a day before he was expected, came suddenly upon the party.

⁴ Pride and Prejudice, Vol. I, Chap. XVI, pp. 129-130.

⁵ Ibid., Vol. II, Chap. XXXIX, p. 51.

But Mr. Darcy was no longer cold and haughty; rather was he the very essence of kindness. He led them graciously and affably from spot to spot on his splendid show place, charming Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner with his courtesy and hospitality.

The conversation soon turned upon fishing; and she heard Mr Darcy invite him [Gardiner], with the greatest civility, to fish there as often as he chose while he continued in the neighborhood, offering at the same time to supply him with fishing tackle, and pointing out those parts of the stream where there was usually most sport.⁶

The entire episode of the Pemberley stroll opened Miss Bennet's eyes to the gentle and generous turn of Mr. Darcy's character, but that little talk on fishing did a great deal more. Here between two sportsmen was born a mutual respect that had its culmination when Gardiner, entrusted by Mr. Bennet with the unpleasant duty of continuing the search for Lydia Bennet and George Wickham, received inestimable aid from Mr. Darcy.

Lydia had run away with Wickham from Brighton, where his regiment had been quartered and where she had been staying. Darcy located the erring pair, paid Wickham's debts, insisted that a marriage take place, attended the ceremony, and in general so completely discharged Mr. Gardiner's mission that Elizabeth's growing love for Darcy burst into full flower when she

⁶ Pride and Prejudice, Vol. II, Chap. XLIII, pp.98-99.

finally learned the whole truth from her aunt.⁷

These and many other situations showed clearly the extensive use Jane Austen made of diversions, yet the entire novel presented a neat picture of real country gentry. Here was no fabricated artifice; here was the simple etching of amusements actually enjoyed by the author and her friends.

One of these relaxations was a dance, called by Mrs. Bennet "the Boulanger"⁸ and by Miss Austen in a letter to Cassandra "the Boulangeries."⁹

This French dance, by the way, was on the unwritten programme at Mr. Bingley's ball, in Pride and Prejudice. It seems to have had its birth in the Revolution, when the bakers, men and women together, kept themselves warm by joining hands and dancing up and down the streets.¹⁰

All the other diversional activities in Pride and Prejudice were undoubtedly of the sort Jane Austen herself knew well in the tiresome mediocrity of her eighteenth-century village life. The most noticeable characteristic of these amusements, moreover, was the particularly feminine angle from which the accurate sketches of real life had been penned. Sports of men, such as hunting and fishing, were merely mentioned in conversa-

⁷ Pride and Prejudice, Vol. II, Chap. LII, pp. 196-203.

⁸ Ibid., Vol. I, Chap. III, p. 18.

⁹ Jane Austen and Her Country-House Comedy, Chap. III, p. 129.

¹⁰ Ibid.

tions; while relaxations engaged in by both sexes were often offered at length and in detail.

Thus that great genius of the commonplace, besides having been a shrewd observer of her little section of English provincial society, was a careful realist who kept well within the limits of her own experiences.

CHAPTER IV

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

Poorest of the six Austen novels in this study, Sense and Sensibility was also the first published, appearing in 1811. Elinor Dashwood symbolized sense, while her sister Marianne stood for sensibility. There was an obvious lack of those qualities that make for a good plot; the outdoor setting, however, was admirable, displaying beautiful scenes at Norland Park in Sussex, Barton Park in Devonshire, and Cleveland in Somersetshire. The social scenes at Barton and London alone made the book a pleasure to read.

Although Elinor, Marianne, and other important persons in the story visited London for months, Jane Austen failed to describe the busy traffic, shops, or theatres of the metropolis. Some of the characters, though, were associated with familiar streets. Mrs. Jennings lived on Berkley Street, Edward Ferrars in Pall Mall, and the Steele sisters in Bartlett's Buildings. Miss Austen herself had stayed in Henrietta Street, in Hans Place, and in Cork Street.

In this novel, just as she had done in the companion story, Pride and Prejudice, our author portrayed life much as she saw it in her own quiet corner of rural England. For example, Marianne Dashwood hoped that her sister Elinor would not marry Edward Ferrars, Elinor's undeclared lover; his read-

ing aloud of Cowper was so subdued and spiritless that Marianne was embarrassed.¹

Miss Austen described no flaming action or consuming passion. She gently stroked with her quiet brush and succeeded in producing several miniature paintings of groups enjoying themselves. Such a gem was that gathering at Barton Park, where the Middletons lived in hospitality and elegance.

In the evening, as Marianne was discovered to be musical, she was invited to play. The instrument was unlocked, everybody prepared to be charmed, and Marianne, who sang very well, at their request went through the chief of the songs which Lady Middleton had brought into the family on her marriage, and which perhaps had lain ever since in the same position on the pianoforte; for her ladyship had celebrated that event by giving up music, although by her mother's account she had played extremely well, and by her own was very fond of it.

Marianne's performance was highly applauded. Sir John was loud in his admiration at the end of every song, and as loud in his conversation with the others while every song lasted. Lady Middleton frequently called him to order, wondered how anyone's attention could be diverted from music for a moment, and asked Marianne to sing a particular song which Marianne had just finished. Colonel Brandon alone, of all the party, heard her without being in raptures.²

Soon after this party of the Middletons, Miss Austen took her readers out into the open so that she could get her weak plot off to its slow start; and at the same time she permitted those readers to come as close to the sport of hunting

¹ Sense and Sensibility, Vol. I, Chap. III, p. 22.

² Ibid., Chap. VII, pp. 46-47.

as anyone could in an Austen novel.

Margaret and Marianne, strolling in Barton Park, were caught in the driving rain. As they ran down the steep hill leading to their garden gate, Marianne fell. "A gentleman carrying a gun, with two pointers playing round him, was passing up the hill and within a few yards of Marianne, when her accident happened."³

He took her up in his arms and did not put her down till he had seated her in a chair in the parlor. It was Willoughby.⁴

Willoughby's attractive personality and charming manners were made much of by the author in the pages directly following the previous example. In both of these instances Jane Austen showed that first impressions can be far from the final truth, that a pleasant, prepossessing appearance does not necessarily mean an exemplary individual, and that good breeding does not always beget good morals.

At any rate, the pleasing Willoughby haunted Barton Cottage during the succeeding days of Marianne's convalescence. They read aloud, they sang, they rode together.

When he was present, she had no eyes for anyone else. Everything he did was right. Everything he said was clever. If their evenings at the park were concluded with

³ Sense and Sensibility, Vol. I, Chap. IX, pp. 56-57.

⁴ Ibid., p. 57.

cards, he cheated himself and all the rest of the party to get her a good hand. If dancing formed the amusement of the night, they were partners for half the time; and when obliged to separate for a couple of dances, were careful to stand together, and scarcely spoke a word to anyone else.⁵

At that point of the story Willoughby was characterized by the hospitable sportsman, Sir John Middleton, as "A very decent shot, and there is not a bolder rider in England."⁶ A minute later Sir John added that Willoughby, at a little hop at the Park, had danced from eight o'clock till four, without once sitting down; moreover he had been up again at eight to ride to covert.⁷

Sir John himself received his accolade directly from the pen of Jane Austen.

He was a blessing to all the juvenile part of the neighborhood, for in summer he was for ever forming parties to eat cold ham and chicken out of doors, and in winter his private balls were numerous enough for any young lady who was not suffering under the insatiable appetite of fifteen.⁸

All in all, the uses of sports and relaxations were much the same here as in Pride and Prejudice; but in Sense and Sensibility the men were characterized more by sports, and Jane Austen did more work in drawing pictures of groups enjoying parties. In both novels the men frequently dined out, visited

⁵ Sense and Sensibility, Vol. I, Chap. XI, p. 73.

⁶ Ibid., Chap. IX, p. 59.

⁷ Ibid., p. 61.

⁸ Ibid., Chap. VII, p. 43.

London, moved about from estate to estate, and talked about hunting, horses, and dogs. The women enjoyed cards, played the harp or pianoforte, attended balls, and visited their friends. Absolutely sure of her material and background, Miss Austen brought individuals and groups together just as naturally as human beings themselves would engineer such gatherings.

For both sexes the chief business of her characters was attention to social duties; their chief interest was matrimony. Miss Austen sensibly limited her work to the little scraps of world she knew; and since she was certain that her presentations of character and scene were authentic, she used the relaxations of her characters to flash her wit and delicate irony and to ridicule lightly the sentimentalists of her day.

CHAPTER V

NORTHANGER ABBEY

This novel, a pleasing combination of a serious love story and a satire on Mrs. Radcliffe's Mysteries of Udolpho, was replete with burlesque situations. As usual, the author kept the use of amusements well within the limits of her own experiences. Jane Austen had visited Bath often in her childhood and later lived there four years with her parents. Her letters from Bath mentioned a continual round of assemblies, card parties, and dances. One extract, which has not been recorded in the scoring, was written from 13 Queen Square, Wednesday (June 19, 1799).

Last night we were in Sydney Gardens again, as there was a repetition of the gala which went off so ill on the 4th. We did not go till nine, and then were in very good time for the fireworks, which were really beautiful, and surpassing my expectation; the illuminations, too, were very pretty. The weather was as favorable as it was otherwise a fortnight ago. The play on Saturday is, I hope, to conclude our gaities here, for nothing but a lengthened stay will make it otherwise.¹

Miss Austen gave us an excellent picture of Bath at a time when the crowds of that elite watering-place met every evening in the Rooms to enjoy dancing, cards, and other diversions. Our youthful heroine, Catherine Morland, was the first

¹ Letters of Jane Austen, Part I, XXI, pp. 300-301.

evening taken to the upper Rooms, where, despite Mrs. Allen's repeated wishes, no dance partner was to be found.²

On the next occasion, though, Catherine made her appearance in the Lower Rooms, where the master of ceremonies introduced Henry Tilney to her. They had an enjoyable time, Tilney because he loved to tease her and Catherine because she loved Tilney!³

In these two incidents Jane Austen very cleverly created the constant illusion of crowded rooms, hurrying gentlemen, over-dressed ladies, and happy couples dancing quietly, oblivious to all the bustle and confusion. She introduced to the heroine her future husband; she made the reader fall in love with Catherine for her unaffected enjoyment of the gentlemanly, teasing Tilney. And she did it all by depicting from memory the dancing scenes she had observed many times in Bath. Her letters made it clear that Jane Austen's own life is often reflected in her books.

Catherine was not allowed to enjoy Henry Tilney unmolested. Isabella Thorpe became her constant, clinging, companion. Jane Austen presented many a scene of the two good-looking girls talking, walking, and dancing. Characterization of

² Northanger Abbey, Chap. II, pp. 11-15.

³ Ibid., Chap. III, pp. 17-24.

the talkative two went on apace; but one common example contained mention of their fondest enjoyments.

The progress of the friendship between Catherine and Isabella was quick as its beginning had been warm; and they passed so rapidly through every gradation of increasing tenderness, that there was shortly no proof of it to be given to their friends or themselves. They called each other by their Christian name, were always arm-in-arm when they walked, pinned up each other's train for the dance, and were not to be divided in the set; and, if a rainy morning deprived them of other enjoyments, they were still resolute in meeting in defiance of wet and dirt, and shut themselves up to read novels together.⁴

Another relaxation, that of driving in a carriage, was given a very extensive use in Northanger Abbey. Driving was used several times to characterize the loud and boastful John Thorpe, but it was used once for suspense and plot.

This was the situation. Catherine had been invited by Mr. Tilney and his sister to take a country walk near Bath. Unless it rained, they were to call for her in Pulteney Street at twelve o'clock.

At twelve o'clock it was raining, but at half past the sky began to clear. Catherine wondered if she should still expect the Tilneys.

Up drove John Thorpe, Isabella, and James Morland in two open carriages. They asked Catherine to drive with them to Clifton for dinner, then to inspect Blaize Castle, show place

⁴ Northanger Abbey, Chap. V, pp. 33-34.

of the area. Catherine protested that she was to go walking with Miss Tilney and her brother, whereupon John Thorpe promptly insisted that he had just seen Tilney and a smart-looking girl driving in another direction.

It was then one o'clock. Catherine, giving up the Tilneys and hoping to see a romantic castle, consented; she was in two minutes in an open carriage beside John Thorpe.

As they entered Argyle Buildings, however, she was roused by this address from her companion, "Who is that girl who looked at you so hard as she went by?"

"Who? where?"

"On the right-hand pavement: she must be almost out of sight now." Catherine looked round, and saw Miss Tilney leaning on her brother's arm, walking slowly down the street. "Stop, stop, Mr. Thorpe," she impatiently cried, "it is Miss Tilney; it is indeed. How could you tell me they were gone? Stop, stop, I will get out this moment and go to them." But to what purpose did she speak? Thorpe only lashed his horse into a brisker trot; the Tilneys, who had soon ceased to look after her, were in a moment out of sight round the corner of Laura Place, and in another moment she was herself whisked into the Market Place.⁵

Of course this was not the end. When Catherine went to the Tilney home to explain, she was rebuffed by the obvious evasion that Miss Tilney was out. The young heroine felt so dejected she almost refused to go to the theatre that night.

It was well that she went. Having enjoyed immensely the first four acts, she found the fifth spoiled by the appearance

⁵ Northanger Abbey, Chap. XI, pp. 99-106.

of Henry Tilney in the opposite box. At the end of the play, however, he appeared to pay his respects to Mrs. Allen; he accepted Catherine's apologies as well and stayed a few minutes to chat.⁶

This glimpse of the theatre party was much enhanced by the naturalness and unaffectedness of Catherine, and by the graciousness and understanding of Henry. Mrs. Allen's minute contribution of "My dear, you tumble my gown," when Catherine wildly called upon her to bear out the truth of the explanation, was the very pin-prick of precision in characterizing that vacant and vapid woman.

Once more it was noticeable that Jane Austen pictured in detail the diversions in which men and women both took part---driving, dancing, the drama. Again the sports of gentlemen appeared only in the mention, but one example contained several references as well as exhibiting the character of John Thorpe. He was driving Catherine in a gig at the time, the conversation beginning and ending with himself.

He told her of horses which he had bought for a trifle and sold for incredible sums; of racing matches in which his judgement had infallibly foretold the winner; of shooting parties, in which he had killed more birds (though without having one good shot) than all his companions together; and described to her some famous day's sport with fox-hounds, in which his foresight and skill in directing the dogs had repaired the mistakes of the more experienced huntsman, and in which the boldness of his riding, though

⁶ Northanger Abbey, Chap. XXI, pp. 112-118.

it had never endangered his own life for a moment, had been constantly leading others into difficulties, which, he calmly concluded, had broken the necks of many.⁷

Northanger Abbey, then, contained numerous shining examples of Miss Austen's use of enjoyments to reveal setting, to further plot, and to delineate character. As usual, she did not depend upon exciting action for the interest of her story, but presented everyday life with the same sympathetic treatment and critical observation found in all her works. While her personages were merely chatting and gossiping on the dance floor in Bath, Jane Austen was delightfully and exquisitely exhibiting their part in the pattern of life and manners at the close of the eighteenth century.

On the other hand, she apparently enjoyed burlesquing the Gothic horrors of Mrs. Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho and playfully ridiculing the sentimental heroine, the haunted castle, and the wild, romantic scenery of that famous terror story of 1794. The light satire of Northanger Abbey, superb in its field, was proof of the fact that a writer does not need to go far from home, even if that home is of the quietest, in order to find material for fiction. The table on which she wrote Pride and Prejudice, Sense and Sensibility, and Northanger Abbey was in the family living room, where she was constantly interrupted by townsfolk who came in to see the parson or his

⁷ Northanger Abbey, Chap. IX, pp. 77-78.

wife; she bore her full share of household duties then, travelled little, knew no celebrated persons, and yet wrote novels that won the unstinting praise of distinguished contemporary writers like Sir Walter Scott and that still find appreciative readers like the ardent Janeites of today.

CHAPTER VI

MANSFIELD PARK

This novel compared very favorably with Pride and Prejudice; indeed, the more mature artistry and the more delicate touches of character in Mansfield Park made a tight question as to which was the better. Mansfield Park showed little of the exaggerated or the dramatic, but it had a variety of characters which displayed a veritable gold mint of technical polish.

Mansfield Park in Northampton was a large mansion with a park six miles around; it was possessed of all the equipment, servants, and carriages necessary to maintain such an extensive realm. Only once did we leave the country, to journey to Portsmouth with Fanny. Jane Austen was equal to the lengthy change in residence. She had often visited seaside towns in England; the smell of the sea, the sight of the ships, and the talk of her sailor brothers must have been helpful in her portrayal of the slovenly Price family.

The episode of the home-made theatricals formed the most brilliant characterization in the book. The Honorable John Yates, a young visitor at Mansfield, stimulated the group to attempt the private acting of a play. Edmund Bertram and Fanny Price objected because theatricals showed a lack of decorum and because Sir Thomas Bertram would certainly never have per-

mitted it had he been there. Argument availed nothing; a play was to be presented.

From that decision on, most of the members acted for all the world like a stage-struck amateur dramatic group today. Tragedies and comedies were suggested and rejected in volume, until at last Lovers' Vows, the play which had originally inspired the whole theatrical shake-up, was tardily chosen. Parts were growled about and fought over; rivalry strutted the stage from dawn till dusk; tempers stalked on endlessly without cue; jealousy took many a curtain call.

Even the mansion changed. The billiard room became the theatre, and a carpenter and a scene painter went to work. The curtain was hung, lines were learned, rehearsals took place.

And then, just as an important rehearsal was about to begin, in very unexpectedly walked Sir Thomas.¹

He was the pin that punctured the balloon. The play, everyone knew instantly, was finished forever at Mansfield Park.

Long before the theatricals, however, Jane Austen had provided impetus for her plot by arranging for Miss Mary Crawford to stay at the Parsonage. Edmund, who had always been kind to Fanny, now began to pay much attention to Miss Crawford. She had been awaiting the arrival of her harp.

¹ Mansfield Park, Vol. I, Chaps. XIII-XVIII, pp. 172-246.

The harp arrived, and rather added to her beauty, wit, and good humour; for she played with the greatest obligingness, with an expression and taste which were peculiarly becoming, and there was something clever to be said at the close of every air. Edmund was at the Parsonage every day, to be indulged with his favorite instrument: one morning secured an invitation for the next; for the lady could not be unwilling to have a listener, and everything was soon in a fair train.²

Nor was that all Fanny had to stand on account of Mary Crawford. Edmund had weeks before secured a mare so Fanny could ride for exercise, and the girl had found much pleasure in riding.

The first actual pain which Miss Crawford occasioned her was the consequence of an inclination to learn to ride, which the former caught soon after being settled at Mansfield, from the example of the young ladies at the Park, and which, when Edmund's acquaintance with her increased, led to his encouraging the wish, and the offer of his own quiet mare for the purpose of her first attempts, as the best fitted for a beginner, that either stable could furnish. No pain, no injury, however, was designed by him to his cousin in this offer: she was not to lose a day's exercise by it. The mare was only to be taken down to the Parsonage half an hour before her ride was to begin; and Fanny, on its being first proposed, so far from feeling slighted, was almost overpowered with gratitude that he should be asking her leave for it.³

The entire episode on riding, only the suggestion of which was pictured in the previous quotation, brought into play Jane Austen's remarkable facility for depicting scenes and customs she had known herself. Besides showing the meek and un-

² Mansfield Park, Vol. I, Chap. VII, p. 91.

³ Ibid., pp. 93-94.

complaining attitude of little Fanny, the author gave us a splendid painting of those early-morning rides the gentry of the countryside took in fair weather. Once more it was a full-length portrait because it was a pleasure that both sexes enjoyed.

Another grouping, the type of which Miss Austen excelled in presenting, was one about the pianoforte one evening at Mansfield Park. The Miss Bertrams, Henry Crawford, and Miss Crawford all hovered over the music and candles at the instrument, while Fanny and Edmund stood looking out at the beautiful twilight scene. Edmund spoke again.

"I had a very apt scholar. There's Arcturus looking very bright."

"Yes, and the Bear. I wish I could see Cassiopeia."

"We must go out on the lawn for that. Should you be afraid?"

"Not in the least. It is a great while since we have had any star-gazing."

"Yes; I do not know how it has happened." The glee began. "We will stay till this is finished, Fanny," said he, turning his back on the window; and as it advanced, she had the mortification of seeing him advance too, moving forward by gentle degrees toward the instrument, and when it ceased, he was close, by the singers, among the most urgent in requesting to hear the glee again.

Fanny sighed alone at the window till scolded away by Mrs Norris's threats of catching cold.⁴

⁴ Mansfield Park, Vol. I, Chap. XI, p. 162.

Mrs. Norris, although a subordinate personage, showed in diversions many twists and turns of her hateful character. To mention just a few of them in one long breath: she made Fanny take extensive walks whenever she herself did, argued that the girl should not have a horse of her own to ride, forced that young lady to cut roses and walk twice across the park in the hot sun while the others were out riding, accepted the work of sewing play costumes but pushed it on to Fanny, and stole the green baize curtain used for the stage.

In these and in many other ways did Jane Austen in this novel bring to the highest pitch her exquisite skill in presenting the routine life and recreation of a rural gentry. Her perfect prose pictures of the class distinction and social snobbery permeating the upper middle class in the English village and its vicinity were true in their interpretation of human nature, but she carefully avoided criticism of the moral worth of her characters. As in her other novels, Miss Austen here failed to present great sin or shame, failed to complicate her story with any great moral problem, failed to offer any great religious thought.

Within this purposely limited field, Jane Austen's realism was little short of perfection. She discovered individuality among commonplace persons and under ordinary circumstances. Apparently able to see the real character under the social veneer, she ridiculed the conceit and sham which she observed in

English country homes of her time; obviously easy and effortless in style, she presented her criticism in richly detailed pictures of life and manners in provincial towns of 1800.

CHAPTER VII

EMMA

This novel was an extremely realistic picture of English gentry life at Hartfield and Randalls, two homes half a mile apart near the tiny town of Highbury in Hertfordshire. Although there was little change of scene and almost no exciting incident, Jane Austen presented polished portrayals of relaxations in those country circles. In this story of courtship and love, the author offered a good plot and her most unusual heroine.

Emma had some interesting diversions not found elsewhere in the Austen novels. One of these was the use of the charade. The handsome Mr. Elton was asked to contribute such an enigma to Harriet Smith's collection.

He composed one but offered it to Harriet through Emma Woodhouse. The first stanza revealed the word court; the second, ship. Thus Mr. Elton proposed courtship to Miss Woodhouse, but both Harriet and Emma thought he meant Harriet.¹

This plot use of recreation had its fulfilment when Emma refused Mr. Elton, only to have him rush to Bath and there meet the vulgar creature who very soon became his wife.

¹ Emma, Vol. I, Chap. IX, pp. 97-99.

Mrs. Elton never forgave Harriet for having aspired to such a high figure as Mr. Elton. She and her husband missed no opportunity to humiliate the girl.

At the ball at the Crown, Mr. Elton neglected to lead Harriet on to the dance floor despite his obvious social obligation to do so. Just as Mr. and Mrs. Elton were exchanging smiles of glee, up stepped Mr. Knightley, leading Harriet to the set.²

The little incident showed his splendid character, for he was no admirer of Harriet. It also complicated the plot. Simple Harriet promptly fell in love with Knightley, led on by Emma, who believed Harriet's mention of a certain gentleman to mean Frank Churchill!

And why that confusion in the mind of Emma? On the day after the ball, Harriet Smith, out enjoying a walk, had been bothered and crowded by gypsies demanding money.³ Frank Churchill had saved her in the nick of time. Thus, whenever Harriet hinted at her love of a gentleman, Emma believed the reference to Churchill when in reality it was to Knightley.

This use of the enjoyment of walking, by the way, marked the only instance when any of Jane Austen's characters were even threatened with bodily harm.

² Emma, Vol. II, Chap. XXXVIII, pp. 126-128.

³ Ibid., Chap. XXXIX, pp. 135-138.

The strawberry-party at Donwell and the picnic at Box Hill proved the rare descriptive ability of the author. The picnic grouping was especially excellent, affording the reader such a natural gathering as made everyone and everything seem real. Emma, Miss Bates, Mrs. Elton, and Frank Churchill were all in rich setting for exhibiting their personal characteristics. Mr. Weston offered the conundrum of two letters of the alphabet that express perfection, and he himself had to give the answer--M and A or Emma.⁴

That same party provided one interesting propulsion to the plot. As the group sauntered in twos or threes about the gardens, Mr. Knightley and Harriet, distinct from the rest, held quiet conversation. He spoke of agriculture when Emma joined them, but he had been talking of marriage. Although he had been arguing for Robert Martin, poor Harriet believed that he spoke for himself.

One far-fetched use of the pianoforte appeared forced into the narrative for the sake of suspense. Jane Fairfax, who had come to stay with her aunt and her grandmother, the Miss and Mrs. Bates, was reputed a superior piano player but had no instrument. Frank Churchill journeyed sixteen miles to London to have his hair cut, and shortly afterward Jane Fairfax received the gift of a piano from an unknown donor!

⁴ Emma, Vol. II, Chap. XLIII, pp. 192-193.

What wonderment and misunderstanding the gift caused! Mr. Weston suspected Knightley of having been the giver; Emma surmised Mr. Dixon; Knightley watched Weston. Churchill and Jane Fairfax knew of these blunders but were content not to let out the truth. All told, the incident was highly improbable.

On the other hand, the young ladies in Emma seemed very true to life when they were overjoyed at the mere prospect of a ball; small wonder at such fidelity to human nature, for Jane Austen once wrote in a friendly letter that she herself could just as well dance for a week as an hour. Again, one young lady lay awake debating between this gown and that; Miss Austen in her letters occasionally wrote of her own interest in the color and style of gowns. Her novels, then, probably owed much to the happiness of Austen family life. In fact, the story of Emma was just as simple as the Austen home life, but the masterful touch of Miss Austen's genius manifested itself throughout, especially in the richness of humor and in the vivid portraiture of character.

Emma will always be remembered for the famous Box Hill picnic, but there were many other shining examples of amusements in the excellent novel. This chapter here will end as another memorable one in Emma ended, with a pretty picture of a happy couple about to dance at the Crown Inn ball.

"Whom are you going to dance with?" asked Mr. Knightley. She hesitated a moment, and then replied, "With you, if

you will ask me."

"Will you?" said he, offering his hand.

"Indeed I will. You have shown that you can dance, and you know we are not really so much brother and sister as to make it at all improper."

"Brother and sister!--no, indeed."⁵

⁵ Emma, Chap. XXXVIII, p. 133.

CHAPTER VIII

PERSUASION

This last work from the pen of Jane Austen characteristically contained splendid description, skillful character delineation, and a rather poor plot. The novel fairly abounded in references to country and town diversions, but very rarely did the reader actually observe the personages enjoying them.

Walking for pleasure led all the rest; indeed, one of these occasions became the turning point in the lives of three important persons in the story. It happened at Lyme, The party had walked down for a last look at the Cobb.

There was too much wind to make the high part of the new Cobb pleasant for the ladies, and they agreed to get down the steps to the lower, and all were contented to pass quietly and carefully down the steep flight, excepting Louisa; she must be jumped down by Captain Wentworth. In all their walks he had had to jump her from the stiles; the sensation was delightful to her. The hardness of the pavement for her feet made him less willing upon the present occasion; he did it, however. She was safely down, and instantly to show her enjoyment, ran up the steps to be jumped down again. He advised her against it, thought the jar too great; but no, he reasoned and talked in vain, she smiled and said, "I am determined I will:" he put out his hands; she was too precipitate by half a second, she fell on the pavement on the Lower Cobb, and was taken up lifeless! There was no wound, no blood, no visible bruise; but her eyes were closed, she breathed not, her face was like death. The horror of that moment to all who stood around!¹

Admiration for Anne Elliot's courage and resourcefulness

¹ Persuasion, Chap. XII, pp. 155-156.

awakened the latent love Captain Wentworth had for Anne. Such a feeling was natural enough, but Miss Austen strained a point for the plot when Louisa Musgrove fell in love with Captain Benwick, who entertained her so solicitously during her convalescence.

That same Captain Benwick received the strangest character portrayal of any person in the Austen novels when Charles Musgrove said of him:

"I have a great value for Benwick; and when one can but get him to talk, he has plenty to say. His reading has done him no harm, for he has fought as well as read. He is a brave fellow. I got more acquainted with him last Monday than ever I did before. We had a famous set-to at rat-hunting all the morning in my father's great barns; and he played his part so well that I have liked him the better ever since."²

It was impossible to study the last novel of Jane Austen without examining once more her favorite use of relaxation, dancing. One instance was a rather pathetic picture of Anne Elliot at the pianoforte while Captain Wentworth danced merrily with the Musgrove girls.

The evening ended with dancing. On its being proposed, Anne offered her services, as usual; and though her eyes would sometimes fill with tears as she sat at the instrument, she was extremely glad to be employed, and desired nothing in return but to be unobserved.

It was a merry, joyous party, and no one seemed in higher spirits than Captain Wentworth.³

² Persuasion, Chap. XXII, p. 313.

³ Ibid., Chap. VIII, p. 100.

The skill of Miss Austen in picturing a group enjoying themselves reached a new Austen high in the Concert Room and Octagon Room scene. It was a concert in Bath for the benefit of a person patronized by Lady Dalrymple. The whole party were there: Sir Walter Elliot, his daughters, and Mrs. Clay; the Dalrymple-Carteret party; Lady Russell, Mr. Elliot, Captain Wentworth, and others.

After various entrances, exquisitely drawn by the detailed Austen touch, Mr. Elliot outmaneuvered Wentworth by getting a seat next to Anne. During part of the entertainment, Anne was obliged to explain details of the concert ball to the insistent Mr. Elliot. Captain Wentworth's jealousy over this became apparent to Anne later in the evening. He bade her a hurried farewell and rushed out, exclaiming that there was nothing worth waiting for.⁴

There was in Persuasion a slight falling off in the number of diversions represented, but the detailed and lengthy accounts of some of them more than made up for the deficiency in number. These diversions were unfolded by the clearest critic that ever probed the faults of human character. Limited as her range of work was, she wrote with painstaking patience until she had the finished novel near perfection. The plot was just as natural and inevitable as life itself; the characters acted

⁴ Persuasion, Chap. XX, p. 272.

always so spontaneously that there was no need for dramatic episodes, except for the accident at the Cobb. From the first page to the last, persons, places, and events were fitted together so naturally that the very simplicity of life's representation made the entire novel border dangerously on the uninteresting.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSIONS

Not at all surprising were the results in this examination of the uses of relaxations and sports in the novels of Jane Austen; they were only informative. The study was not erudite or philosophical; it was merely a sincere effort to make certain by the literary microscope what had been fairly clear to the naked eye.

Jane Austen observed carefully and pictured accurately the people and the life of the rural gentry of her day. She used their amusements to show personality and to enhance plot. Knowing little about sports afield, Miss Austen contented herself with snatch references and conversational comments on hunting, fishing, riding. Enjoying cards, dances, and balls so much herself, she plied assiduously her artistic technique in beautifully detailed accounts.

Few writers have more lucidly pictured personal enjoyment, and none other has done it more delicately; few writers have more cleverly depicted character by amusement, and none other has ever matched the word witchery with which the inimitable Jane Austen presented her party pictures.

Within her particular field of presenting men and women in relaxations and entertainments, Jane Austen was without peer. Throughout the six novels used in this study, her char-

acterization was uniformly good, even though she did not depict men against a masculine background but showed them only as a woman might observe them. Especially clever in drawing her memorable comic characters, she displayed barbed wit and quiet humor when satirizing such human weaknesses as insincerity, selfishness, and sentimentality. She exhibited in each novel a sincere admiration for courage and common sense.

Besides excellent characterization, the six novels manifested a careful planning and a detailed working-out of the plot. Every incident appeared just by its nature to be in the right spot; people seemed to come and go of their own volition rather than at the author's command.

Admirable in style, carefully wrought in structure, delightful in humor, conventional in idea, sparkling in irony, critical in manner, the novels had just the right blending of characterization and plot to distinguish her stories from the real life which she pictured.

Although the setting of each novel differed from that of the others, all still represented the same sort of country place, home environment, and class of people. Taken as a whole, the six novels offered a realistic portrayal of commonplace life among the rural gentry of England at the turn of the nineteenth century.

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

An Abstract
of a Thesis

AMUSEMENTS, GAMES, AND SPORTS MENTIONED
IN SIX NOVELS OF JANE AUSTEN

by

John De La Salle Thornton

(A.B., College of the Holy Cross, 1926)

submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

1945

Any student who would make a thorough examination of the work of Jane Austen would be obliged to scrutinize carefully her frequent use of amusements, games, and sports. As an outstanding novelist of manners, Miss Austen's great contribution to English literature has been the representation of the rural gentry of her time. On that account her novels have an historical as well as literary value.

It was the purpose of the following study to place on record the several kinds of amusements, games, and sports mentioned in the Austen novels; to offer at length particular instances of Miss Austen's use of these diversions; and to comment concerning her artistry and technique in the presentation of such material.

So far as was known, no other student had ever attempted to gauge the literary ability shown in Jane Austen's continued employment of enjoyments and pastimes. Yet her settings were mainly those of balls, parties, and social gatherings of other kinds; her characters were always showing their idiosyncrasies and mannerisms in relaxation; her plots were often enhanced by the use of recreation.

This study was made by checking all mention and use of diversional activities, some varieties of which were presented in detail. Attempts were also made to offer a measure of criticism of the application Miss Austen made of recreational items. Eating, drinking, smoking, teasing, and visiting were not con-

sidered typical.

The novels were studied in the following order: Pride and Prejudice, Sense and Sensibility, Northanger Abbey, Mansfield Park, Emma, and Persuasion. Since Jane Austen did not herself publish Lady Susan and did not finish The Watsons, they were not considered.

It is common knowledge that Jane Austen was a thorough-going realist who pictured personages, scenes, and places well-known to Englishmen of those times. She had lived in every atmosphere she painted. She delighted in walking, dancing, cards, and the theatre.

Since ladies and gentlemen of rural society had little more to do than to seek enjoyment in one another's company, many hours of the day and evening were spent in pleasure and sport. Miss Austen, then, had occasion to use diversion a great deal and still present a realistic portrayal of life.

Pride and Prejudice offered balls, card parties, and walking. Philip Darcy's rudeness at one ball and Elizabeth Bennet's refusal of him at another were excellent examples of the use of dancing to depict character and to further plot. The most extensive treatment accorded to the sport of fishing appeared in this novel; it was only a paragraph in which Darcy offered all the accessories of the sport to Mr. Gardiner, but the friendship resulting from this kindness aided the Bennet family later.

Sense and Sensibility showed an interesting picture of a group at Barton Park, home of the Middletons. Marianne Dashwood played and sang, while all in the party reacted according to their individual personalities. This story also took the reader as close as ever to the sport of hunting, when the author introduced Willoughby. He had a gun, while two pointers disported about him. At that moment he merely picked Marianne up and carried her into her home, but he dominated her life for months to come.

Northanger Abbey was remarkable for its splendid miniatures of the Rooms at Bath, crowded as they were with gentry in search of diversion. The mishaps and misgivings of two driving incidents delineated the character of John Thorpe and contributed suspense.

Mansfield Park provided the longest and most detailed account of any amusement in the Austen novels. During the rehearsals for the amateur presentation of the play Lovers' Vows, practically everybody in the story exhibited his twists of character, from poor little Fanny Price, who did not wish to take part, to Mrs. Norris, who stole the green baize curtain used on the stage. Riding received its highest treatment here, as well as did playing upon the harp.

Emma had the strawberry party at Donwell and the famous picnic at Box Hill as its perfect pictures of rural enjoyment, but the mysterious gift of a new pianoforte to Jane Fairfax

made a highly improbable incident.

Persuasion led all the other novels in the best treatment of walking. The celebrated incident took place at Lyme, where Louisa fell to the pavement of the Lower Cobb. Plot, character, and suspense were born at the moment. In addition, the concert sponsored by Lady Dalrymple was a miniature the like of which few word-painters could draw.

All in all, the novels offered to the reader a most unusual study. One conclusion was evident; few other writers in our language made such continual and consistent employment of diversional activities. Besides concluding that Miss Austen's use of these recreations was skillful, the results were extremely informative. The literary microscope made certain that Miss Austen herself liked play and that she showed the character and environment of rural gentry largely by her use of diversion.

Jane Austen observed carefully and pictured accurately the life of her day. She contented herself with conversational comments on the sports of men, but wrote detailed accounts of diversions in which both sexes took part. Few authors could match her character portrayals, or equal her party pictures.

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